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James Aubrey's Fall

Article in Life Depicts C.B.S. Official as Tyrant—He's Gone, but Pressure Stays

By JACK GOULD

Why was James T. Aubrey Jr. dismissed last February as president of the Columbia Broadcasting System television network? Six months after his removal an article in the current issue of Life magazine, out today, ascribes the ouster to a combination of circumstances.

First, according to the article, William S. Paley, C.B.S. board chairman, and Dr. Frank Stanton, president of the parent company, had been disenchanted for some months with Mr. Aubrey's reputed indifference to the public service aspects of television and with his taste in popular entertainment shows.

Second, the Federal Communications Commission had been asking questions about possible conflicts of interest between the network and package producers. The Life article asserts that Mr. Aubrey lived in an apartment that was partly paid for by one package producer dealing with C.B.S., and used a car and chauffeur provided by a second packager.

Wild Party Spurred Action

Third, a wild party in Miami, to which police were summoned although no arrests were made, was said to have been attended by Mr. Aubrey a few days before he lost his job. His presence, according to the magazine, gave C.B.S. an immediate reason to proceed with his removal.

The Life article, written by Richard Oulahan and William Lambert, has been a subject of discussion in the television trade for many weeks. The delay between its preparation and its publication created a measure of sympathy for Mr. Aubrey, who has been living under the shadow of its threatened revelations for half a year.

The article, bearing the title of "The Tyrant's Fall That Rocked the TV World," dwells at length on Mr. Aubrey's relations with Richelieu Productions, headed by Keefe Braselle, a former song-and-dance man. The magazine notes that Richelieu was awarded production contracts for three programs last season—"The Reporter," "Baileys of Balboa" and the Cara Williams show—and that the programs were said to have enjoyed record allowances for unbudgeted expenses.

Life adds that Richelieu Pro-

ductions met the cost of a car and chauffeur which Mr. Aubrey used throughout 1964, although he had a C.B.S. limousine at his disposal at the same time.

In November, 1963, according to the magazine article, Mr. Aubrey moved into the apartment of Martin Ransohoff, head of Filmways, Inc., at 116 Central Park South. Filmways thereafter paid \$200 of the \$690 monthly rental, the magazine said.

The article further states that C.B.S. did not report the lease arrangement to the F.C.C., even though the commission had asked earlier for any evidence of possible conflict of interest in program production practices.

Life also reports that in October of last year a Federal tax lien was filed against Mr. Aubrey for \$38,047 in overdue taxes for 1962. The bill was settled last January, together with payment of \$3,000 in interest charges, the magazine says.

Looking for Properties

Mr. Aubrey was in Los Angeles yesterday, and not immediately available for comment. He has not announced any new business affiliation, but has acknowledged that he is looking for properties in which to invest and provide management leadership. It was during his presidency of the television network that C.B.S. enjoyed its biggest profits, although the ratings of C.B.S. shows declined just before his removal.

The magazine repeats what was widely publicized at the time of Mr. Aubrey's eviction: he was the absolute monarch of C.B.S. television, having moved into a vacuum that developed when Mr. Paley and Dr. Stanton became absorbed in their expanding responsibilities on the higher corporate level.

Where Life may err is in suggesting that Mr. Aubrey's departure marked something of the end of an era in television. The war of the ratings among new shows begins a week from today, and the pressure cooker for hapless TV executives once again will be fired up. The overriding question is whether Mr. Aubrey really was a creator of a jungle, or only one of the more spectacular products of the industry's cruelly competitive environment. The answer is not to be found in the gossip of Madison Avenue, but on the home screen.